

Survivor Series Count-Up – 1996: They're At The Starting Gate

Survivor Series 1996

Date: November 17, 1996

Location: Madison Square Garden, New York City, New York

Attendance: 18,647

Commentators: Jim Ross, Vince McMahon, Jerry Lawler

To MSG we go as we're in a very different era here. Shawn is world champion but is also burned out and needing some time away from the ring. He's defending against Sid tonight, but that's not the important thing tonight. There's a major debut, but aside from that, we've got Bret Hart returning for the first time since losing the title to Shawn to face a bald headed Texan who is tired of hearing how great guys like Hart are and wants to prove how great he is. His name is Stone Cold Steve Austin and tonight is his coming out party. Let's get to it.

After a quick look at what's been going on in MSG to hype the show we're ready to go.

Team Furnas and Lafon vs. Team Owen Hart/British Bulldog

Doug Furnas, Phillip Lafon, Godwinns

Owen Hart, British Bulldog, New Rockers

The New Rockers are Leif Cassidy (Al Snow) and Marty Jannetty. Furnas and Lafon are feuding with Hart and Bulldog for Smith and Hart's tag titles. Furnas and Lafon were a team who mainly worked in AJPW in Japan who were better than they're given credit for. Apparently Furnas is the one with the long hair. Got it. I can never remember which is which. Lafon vs. Marty starts things off and they trade arm holds, but Lafon avoids a monkey flip. The Rockers are heels here if that's not clear.

Off to Cassidy who is a better technical guy. Lafon goes after the leg

but Cassidy comes back with a leg drag. Off to Phineas who spits into the air, catches it, and rubs it in his hair. Cassidy messes with Phineas and hides in the ropes as a result. A clothesline puts Godwin down and it's off to Owen for some stomping. Off to Bulldog for more beating but I keep getting distracted by the agents and other people coming in and out of the door to the backstage area at the top of the aisle.

Eventually we get down to Marty vs. Phineas with Jannetty taking over with a jumping back elbow. Marty loads up his Superbomb but gets crotched. Phineas loads up a superplex (JR: "How stupid was that of him?") but gets shoved down. Marty misses an elbow and there's the hot tag minus the heat to bring in Henry vs. Marty. Phineas dives into the corner to stop Henry from hitting the buckle and it's the Slop Drop (reverse DDT) to eliminate Jannetty. Owen immediately spinwheel kicks Henry to tie it up.

Phineas goes into one of his fits and beats up everyone, but Bulldog gets a blind tag and powerslams Phineas to make it 3-2. All three of those eliminations were in less than a minute so I didn't skip anything. It's Furnas/Lafon vs. Cassidy/Hart/Bulldog. Furnas and Bulldog start things off and Furnas is in trouble. Off to Cassidy for a spinning Rock Bottom for two. Furnas speeds things up but Owen gets a blind tag in and hits a sweet missile dropkick for two.

A fisherman's suplex gets two for Owen and some heel triple teaming has Furnas in trouble. JR goes on another rant about how the two referees are making no difference here. This is during the time when JR had gone heel for the first time but it wouldn't last much longer. Back to Cassidy who hits a gutbuster but doesn't cover for some reason. Cassidy misses a charge and there's the tag to Lafon, who hits a quick reverse superplex to eliminate Leif and get us down to the main two tag teams.

It's Lafon vs. Bulldog with Davey being dropped on his face. Owen comes in with a cross body for two. A neckbreaker and a legdrop get two on Lafon as does an enziguri. Back to Bulldog who kicks Lafon low to keep control. Things break down a bit and Lafon hits a quick sunset flip on Smith for the elimination. It's Owen vs. Furnas and Lafon with Lafon in the ring to start the last part.

Owen goes after the leg including an Indian Deathlock and the Sharpshooter but Furnas makes the save. Lafon hits a spin kick to take Hart down and there's the hot tag to Furnas (pun intended). Doug destroys Owen with suplexes and a release German gets the final pin. Furnas beat him in about thirty seconds.

Rating: C+. This didn't suck but it didn't hit a level they were reaching for. Furnas and Lafon didn't look right here and the crowd didn't really know who they were yet, so the place was hardly rocking. It's not a bad match but it didn't quite work like it was supposed to. Things will pick up soon on this show though.

Kevin Kelly is in the boiler room with Mankind, who he abandoned Undertaker for at Summerslam. Tonight the huge rivalry continues with Bearer locked in a small cage above the ring. This is when Mankind was still relatively new (he debuted about six and a half months before this) and no one knew what to make of him yet. All anyone knew was he could beat up Undertaker which was unheard of at the time.

Mankind vs. Undertaker

Bearer has to be locked in the small cage. This is a Cornette Special. Taker lowers down from the rafters in what can only be called a Batman costume minus the mask. Taker also has on a new attire for this, which is basically a biker vest and leather pants. That would become his standard look for the next three years or so. Mankind rams him into the small cage to start and they head to the floor very quickly.

Back in and Taker gets all fired up before busting out a drop toehold. He goes after Mankind's right arm to take away the Mandible Claw, which is the only hold that can stop Undertaker. Taker puts on a cross armbreaker of all things, which is something he would occasionally bust out when he was MMA Cowboy Of Death mode but I didn't think he did it back here. Apparently if Taker wins he gets five minutes with Mankind. We head back to the floor with Taker ramming the arm into the barricade again. Back in and Taker misses an elbow but he sits up immediately.

We head to the floor for the third time via a Cactus Clothesline and they head into the crowd. Mankind charges at Taker but gets backdropped over

the barricade and onto the concrete. A low blow puts Taker down on the apron and down onto the floor, where Mankind hits the elbow off the apron. Taker gets sent into the buckle but comes back with an elbow to the face.

Taker headbutts him halfway out of the ring as this continues to be a total brawl so far. Undertaker bites on the Claw hand but he lowers his head and gets piledriven down for two. Mankind loads up the Claw but Taker blocks the hands. The Tombstone is countered and there's the Claw. Taker sends him out to the floor which is one of the first times that hold has been broken.

Old School hits but Mankind pops up and hits a double arm DDT to put Taker down. Mankind goes up but jumps into a chokeslam. The Claw goes on but Taker chokeslams him anyway. Cool spot. Taker tries a cross body but he crashes over the top and out to the floor. Mankind tries a flip dive off the apron but crashes just as badly as Taker did. Back in and Mankind tries a quick sleeper, only to be suplexed down by Taker.

Even JR is talking about how much more wrestling Undertaker is doing here which is indeed a strange sight. Mankind pulls out a foreign object to stab at Taker with. Unlike Lawler's style, there's an actual object here for Mankind to hit him with. Mankind climbs on his back in the corner but Taker pulls Mankind down and KILLS HIM with the Tombstone for the pin.

Rating: B. Foley said in his book that this is his least favorite of the series with Taker, which is saying a lot because this is a very solid brawl. It's physical for the full fifteen minutes it runs with two large guys beating the tar out of each other. On top of that, it's cool to see Taker work a new style while in an entirely new attire as well. Good stuff here.

Bearer's cage is lowered to Taker but the Executioner (Terry Gordy in a hood) makes the save. Taker beats him up but Bearer escapes.

Sunny (still smoking hot and not smoking crack here) comes out for commentary.

Team HHH, with the IC Champion as captain, is ready for Marc Mero. Mark

Henry was supposed to be on HHH's team but he's injured. I'm shocked too.

Team Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Team Marc Mero

Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Jerry Lawler, Goldust, Crush

Marc Mero, Jake Roberts, The Stalker, Rocky Maivia

I think you know everyone here. Stalker is Barry Windham as a kind of military guerrilla warfare character. This is Rocky's debut, so who do you think the focus is going to be on? Lawler and Roberts are feuding as well. Mero has Sable with him here. Sunny immediately freaks out on JR for suggesting Sable is hotter. She yells about being natural while Sable is about to melt near the fireworks. Rocky's outfit looks ridiculous with kind of a cape but made of streamers that goes over his chest as well. Apparently Roberts was a surprise partner and the replacement for Henry.

Jake comes out with the big yellow snake sans bag and chases the team off with it. Goldust and Mero get things going with Marc cranking on the arm. They both block hiptosses so Mero rolls him up for two. Off to Stalker who is now just a guy in camo pants and a WWF t-shirt. Back to Mero to fire off a bunch of hiptosses to Goldie who is a bit calmer than he was last year. Rollup gets two for Mero and it's back to the arm. Stalker pounds away at Goldie's ribs before it's off to HHH. Off to Mero to face Crush as HHH wanted nothing to do with Wildman (Mero).

Mero grabs the arm and for you trivia guys out there, Rocky's first official time in a WWF ring is against Crush. It lasts all of six seconds before it's off to Lawler who is immediately punched, kicked in the face, and knocked to the floor. You know Lawler is going to go insane with the selling too. Lawler wants nothing to do with Rocky so it's off to HHH. Vince explains that Rocky's name is Dwayne Johnson and that he took the name of his father and grandfather to come up with Rocky Maivia.

In the first of many matches, HHH stomps away in the corner and JR is in football mode. Goldust comes in and drops an elbow followed by some rights to the head. Crush comes in and works on the back for a bit before it's off to Lawler. Back to HHH as Sunny makes fun of Vince for allegedly having a toupee. Rocky pounds away and backdrops HHH before it's off to

Roberts.

Jake beats up everyone but tries to get to Lawler instead of going after the legal HHH. The shortarm clothesline takes HHH down but the DDT doesn't work. Off to Lawler who makes fun of Roberts for being an alcoholic. Lawler keeps doing it and there's the DDT for the first elimination. Goldust comes in next as JR makes fun of the lack of tan on Roberts. We hit the chinlock for a bit until jawbreaker gets Jake out of it. Off to Stalker as JR and Sunny talk about Barry wearing lucky boots. Crush hits Stalker in the back and the Curtain Call (reverse suplex drop) gets the pin for Goldust to tie things up.

Mero comes in immediately to hit a knee lift to take over. Goldie gets in a shot and HHH finally comes in to beat on the other captain. A backbreaker puts Mero down and it's back to Crush. This is during Crush's gang member phase and he couldn't look more out of place with his partners at this point. A legdrop gets two for Crush and it's off to Goldie. Back to Crush for another backbreaker for two. Things are slowing down a bit here.

HHH comes in again and puts on an abdominal stretch. He gets caught holding the ropes and hiptossed out as is his custom with referees. A sunset flip can't get HHH down before he makes the tag to Goldust. HHH is back in about five seconds later and let's look at Sunny! Ok I can't complain about that one as much. Jake is pulled in sans tag, allowing Mero to hit a moonsault press on HHH for the elimination. That was a very messy sequence with all the tags with nothing happening between them and the non-tag to Jake. Either that or I missed a tag and Mero was totally illegal when he pinned HHH.

It's Mero/Rocky/Roberts vs. Crush/HHH. Crush comes in next and is almost immediately dropkicked out to the floor. Mero loads up a dive but Goldust makes a save and shoves Crush out of the way. Back inside, Crush's Heart Punch (exactly what it sounds like) pins Mero. We were looking at a replay when it happened though so that's hearsay. Roberts comes in, misses the short clothesline and is Heart Punched out as well.

We're left with Rocky (who actually gets a face chant in MSG at this

point) vs. Goldust and Crush. He starts with the one not painted like an Academy Award and accepts a Test of Strength for some reason. A small package out of nowhere gets two for Maivia and here's Goldust again. Rocky cross bodies Crush for no count as both bad guys are in the ring at once. Goldust hits Rocky low which isn't illegal apparently but Crush Heart Punches Goldie. Cross body pins Crush and about thirty seconds later, a shoulder breaker (Rocky's original finisher) gets the final pin.

Rating: C+. This dragged a bit in the middle, but it accomplished three goals: Roberts got to knock Lawler out cold, Mero got to pin HHH to continue their feud, and Rocky got to debut strongly. The problem is the rest of the match wasn't much to see. Maivia winning over guys like Crush and Goldust is a good thing because it's unrealistic to have him beat the IC Champion and beating Lawler doesn't mean anything because Lawler is a career jobber in the WWF. Crush is a big imposing guy who is also a jobber, but at least he looks intimidating. Goldust has credentials too and a loss isn't going to hurt him. Smart booking.

We recap Bret vs. Austin in arguably the real main event of the night. Austin has spent weeks or months talking about how what Hart did means nothing. Bret hasn't been seen since Wrestlemania when he lost to Shawn. Tonight we have to see if Austin can back up what he's saying against a rusty Hitman. The hype on this was excellent and still works to this day.

Bret says MSG is holy ground for him.

Steve Austin vs. Bret Hart

They stare each other down in the middle of the ring and Austin flips Hart off. This feels like a huge fight which is exactly what it's supposed to do. Austin takes Bret into the corner and gives a clean break. Bret goes for Austin's leg and they go into the corner as well for another clean break. I love matches where the guys mirror each other. JR says neither of these guys have ever submitted in the WWF. That's not actually true but we'll go with it for the sake of simplicity.

Austin actually wins a technical battle and cranks on the arm. Bret does the same and adds a hammerlock. They fight for wristlocks and Bret takes it to the mat, working on the arm. Austin fights up and takes his head

off with an elbow. Bret stays technical, Austin turns it into a brawl. This is going to have some good psychology in it I'd assume. Bret takes it right back to the mat and cranks on the arm again.

Back up and Austin drops Bret with a Stun Gun and immediately chokes. Hit the neck, work on the neck. It's not complicated. Austin stomps on the neck and throat before slingshotting Bret's throat into the bottom rope. An elbow to the neck/chest sends Bret to the floor and Austin is starting to roll. Back in and Austin hooks a chinlock before dropping knees to the chest/throat for two.

They slug it out with Austin knocking Bret into the corner. Bret comes back with an atomic drop (which Vince calls a reverse piledriver because he's Vince McMahon and isn't a very good announcer) and a clothesline followed by a Russian legsweep for two. A bulldog attempt by Hart is countered by sending him chest first into the buckle. Austin loads up a superplex but Bret slams him down and hits a top rope elbow for a delayed two.

Austin escapes a backbreaker with a rake of the eyes as momentum shifts again. Bret gets sent to the floor and Austin just pounds on him with forearms and punches. Austin rams him back first into the post as the attacks shifts to the back. Bret comes back by sending him into the barricade, breaking the thing apart. They head into the front row and knock the barricade over. Austin is in trouble again and Bret chases him to the other side of the ring.

Steve is like screw this defense thing and sling shots Bret onto the Spanish announce table. They fight underneath the table with Austin pounding away. Austin was a smart heel in that instead of standing around, he wanted to beat on Bret even more when he had Bret down. Back in and Austin drops a middle rope elbow for two. A running crotch attack to Bret's back gets another two and Austin is getting frustrated.

Off to an abdominal stretch and of course Austin grabs the rope. Back up and Bret wins a slugout before Stun Gunning Austin right back to take over again. A piledriver puts Steve down for two and Bret is exhausted. Bret hits a backbreaker and goes up, only to get crotched and superplexed

down. Austin has that look in his eye where you know he's feeling it. Bret hooks Austin's feet after the superplex but only gets two.

Bret goes after Austin and walks into a Stunner but it only gets two. It gets another two and make that four. Austin is all ticked off now and pounds away at Bret before getting two more. He puts Bret in a solid Texas Cloverleaf but Bret still won't quit. He makes the rope and the fans breathe a sigh of relief. Austin sends him into the corner but Bret's knee gives out and Bret's back hits the post.

That gets two and Austin goes back to the Cloverleaf. Scratch that as he makes it a bow and arrow instead. It's amazing how much different that broken neck made Austin. He's a completely different guy here and it works really well too. Austin grabs the ropes to block a Sharpshooter and there's a sleeper but Austin hits a jawbreaker to escape. Austin slaps on the Million Dollar Dream but Bret climbs up the buckles and backflips onto Austin for the surprise pin. Steve is stunned, no pun intended. Apparently this was a #1 contenders match. Ok then.

Rating: A+. It's Austin vs. Hart for 25 minutes. Were you expecting anything but a masterpiece? This match isn't remembered for one reason: they had a rematch which is one of the greatest matches of all time. This however is liked better by a lot of people and I can easily get that. This is a pure, hard hitting wrestling match which ends with a wrestling counter. The psychology here is incredible with Austin wanting to prove he can go move for move with Bret before finally getting outsmarted when Austin was frustrated and trying one of his old moves. This is one of the best pairings of all time.

Sid is ready for Shawn tonight.

Team Farrooq vs. Team Yokozuna

Farrooq, Vader, Razor Ramon, Diesel

Yokozuna, Flash Funk, Savio Vega, Jimmy Snuka

Snuka is a mystery partner, Yoko literally must weigh 700lbs, and these are the fake Ramon and Diesel. Diesel here is more famous as Kane.

Cornette is on commentary here and freaks out because of Snuka, who was inducted into the Hall of Fame last night. This is when the HOF was even more of a joke than it is today. Funk and Vader get things going as this match couldn't be more filler if it tried.

Vader pummels him in the corner but Funk comes back with a kick that misses by so much that even Vince has to say it didn't hit. Vader goes down anyway. Vader is sent to the floor and Funk hits a moonsault to take him out and send Cornette into heart attack mode. Back in and Vader powerbombs him down but it's off to Yoko. That goes nowhere so it's off to Farroq vs. Savio. This is Farroq's debut with the Nation of Domination which is just him at this point.

Razor comes in and JR, the guy that brought them in, wants nothing to do with them. JR says he'd be a better manager than Cornette would.

Cornette: "You couldn't manage a Wendy's!" JR: "I could if you were in town." Razor can't do the fallaway slam so it's off to Diesel. Remember that this is New York City so guess how well this is received. Diesel pounds on Funk, Funk fires back, Diesel knocks him down, CAN WE GET THIS OVER WITH ALREADY???

Funk tries a sunset flip but gets chokebombed for his efforts. Off to Farroq who gets flipped around by Funk but Flash walks into a snap spinebuster. Here's Vader for some mauling before Savio gets the tag. Off to Snuka who charges into a Diesel knee. Vader vs. Snuka now and Superfly actually slams him.

Off to Savio who gets beaten up by Farroq on the floor. Back in and Diesel Jackknives Snuka for the first elimination. Off to Snuka vs. Ramon now with Snuka slamming him down and hitting the Superfly Splash for the elimination. Then everyone brawls in the ring and EVERYONE IS FREAKING DQ'ED TO END THE MATCH.

Rating: F. There was no reason for this match to happen, Ramon and Diesel were STUPID, Yoko was disgustingly fat, Farroq was a waste of a debut, Snuka isn't a good surprise at all. There's nothing to see here and it was one of the worst matches I can remember in a long time. Also it's less than ten minutes long, making it the shortest Survivor Series match

ever.

We recap Sid vs. Shawn. They used to be partners and now they're fighting over the title. Sid is nuts and that's about it.

WWF World Title: Shawn Michaels vs. Sycho Sid

Sid's name in pyro was always cool. The fans aren't all that thrilled with Shawn but it's not booing. Shawn charges at Sid and is immediately knocked down with right hands. The champ (Shawn) stands in one place and punches even faster which apparently is ok. Off to a headlock on the mat but Sid NIPS UP and pounds away. There's a gorilla press attempt but Shawn lands on his feet. Sid tries the powerbomb (POP) but Shawn bails to the floor.

Back in and Shawn takes out the knee before hitting a Robinsdale Crunch (it's a leg lock with Shawn jumping to crush the knee). The fans chant for Sid. Off to a Figure Four for awhile before Sid rolls it over. Shawn goes for the hold again but Sid kicks him shoulder first into the post. Sid slows things down and starts firing off some kicks to the head and ribs.

Shawn avoids a charge into the corner and goes after the knee some more. Sid kicks him into the ropes and Shawn skins the cat, but Sid clotheslines him right to the floor. Shawn gets dropped on the barricade which gets two back inside. Sid hits a few running kicks to the head in the corner as things slow down again. Michaels avoids a charge in the corner and goes up, with the fans openly booing him now.

The champ dives into a backbreaker for two and Shawn can barely get up. Shawn fights up and turns it into a slugout with Sid going down. We get the always stupid looking jump into the boot spot and Sid puts on a cobra clutch. Shawn fights up and walks into a chokeslam. The place is exploding for Sid here. The powerbomb is countered into a small package for two but Sid gets the same off a powerslam.

Shawn nips up and is immediately clotheslined down to a BIG pop. Sid grabs a camera and blasts Jose Lithario (Shawn's manager) in the chest with it for no apparent reason. Shawn superkicks Sid down but stops to

look at Jose instead of covering. The referee goes down somewhere in there and Shawn gets hit with the camera as well. Back inside Sid powerbombs Shawn down for the pin and the title. Girl in the front row: "N000000000000000!!!!!!!"

Rating: B. Shawn's heart wasn't in this at all and that was clear throughout the match. His eyes didn't have it in there anymore and it's really no surprise that after February he would take time off to find his smile. This was good stuff for the most part but the ending seemed overdone. Little trivia for you: this is Sid's first title in the WWF or WCW. You would have thought he would have gotten something before then, given the PPVs he main evented.

Shawn scrambles to the back to check on Jose.

Overall Rating: B+. There's some awesome stuff on here with a lot of historical stuff in there too. There's one really bad match but it only lasts ten minutes or so. Other than that, this show is pretty much golden. Solid show overall but the company was entering a dark age with the NWO destroying them. That being said, the Austin vs. Bret feud would continue for most of a year and would keep the promotion alive once they hit the double turn in the spring. Good show here and much better than I remember.

Ratings Comparison

Team Furnas and Lafon vs. Team Owen Hart and British Bulldog

Original: B-

Redo: C+

Undertaker vs. Mankind

Original: C+

Redo: B

Team Hunter Hearst Helmsley vs. Team Marc Mero

Original: D

Redo: C+

Bret Hart vs. Steve Austin

Original: A+

Redo: A+

Team Farroq vs. Team Yokozuna

Original: D-

Redo: F

Sycho Sid vs. Shawn Michaels

Original: C-

Redo: B

Overall Rating

Original: B-

Redo: B+

Like I said, I liked it better than I remembered.

Here's the original review if you're interested:

<http://kbwrestlingreviews.com/2011/11/15/history-of-survivor-series-count-up-1996-bret-vs-austin-the-prequel-and-rock-debuts/>

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